



**Congress of the United States**  
**House of Representatives**  
Washington, DC 20515-4302

May 15, 2017

The President  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.  
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

I write to respectfully request that you address the deteriorating human rights situation in Turkey during your May 16<sup>th</sup> meeting with President Erdogan.

As you know, Turkey is one of the United States' most important and critically strategic allies, bridging the divide between the Middle East and Europe. Turkey has been part of the NATO alliance since 1952 and the U.S. Air Force has used Incirlik Air Base in the southern part of the country during the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq. With the current ISIS threat and the turmoil in Syria and Iraq, the U.S.-Turkish alliance is more important and necessary than ever.

It is because of Turkey's crucial role as a U.S. and NATO ally that I fear the country's descent into authoritarianism. For several years now, the Turkish government appears to be undermining the rule of law, destroying the system of checks and balances enshrined in the Turkish political system, and centralizing power in the hands of President Erdogan. The erosion of democratic values has precipitously accelerated since the July 2016 attempted coup. President Erdogan's reaction was to declare a state of emergency and seemingly exploit the situation to suppress any and all opposition to his rule and to the supremacy of the Justice and Development Party (AKP). Roughly 50,000 people have since been arrested, including parliamentarians from the opposition party; 100,000 more have been sacked from government jobs, including judges and civil servants.

In this purge of AKP critics, Turkish civil liberties and democratic institutions have been under attack. Turkey quickly earned the shameful reputation of jailing more journalists than any other country. The government shuttered 178 news outlets and publishing houses by decree in the space of five months. Freedom of assembly has been all but denuded as the government expanded police power to detain protesters without judicial supervision. Unfortunately, it has become commonplace to see peaceful political demonstrations in the country be broken up

forcibly, sometimes with the use of water cannons and tear gas. Over 1,200 nongovernmental organizations, particularly those associated with the opposition, have been closed without any judicial proceedings.

In the latest blow to Turkish democracy, Turkey held a constitutional referendum last month under a state of emergency that was marred by a lack of transparency according to both the Turkish opposition and the European Commission. The constitutional change will allow the winner of the 2019 presidential election, most likely Erdogan, to assume full control of the government, ending the current parliamentary system. The immediate result, however, is President Erdogan's tightening grip on the country.

Turkey's concerning and disappointing devolution to dictatorship is especially concerning to me as a Member of the House Committee on Foreign Affairs' Subcommittee on Europe. Like many of my colleagues in Congress, I had high hopes for Turkey's democratic trajectory and possible accession into the European Union. That eventuality appears to be increasingly impossible as the government continues to weaken the democratic institutions that once made Turkey stand out as a model in the region. During your meeting with President Erdogan, I humbly ask that you raise these issues for the sake of Turkish democracy and our bilateral and NATO alliance.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'TED POE', with a stylized, jagged underline.

TED POE  
Member of Congress  
TEXAS